



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General  
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

## Lessons Learned Record of Interview

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Phone				
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To gain perspective on NSC strategy and planning processes on Afghanistan				
<b>Present</b>				
Candace Rondeaux				
<b>SIGAR Attendees:</b>				
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<b>Prepared By:</b> (Name, title and date)				
Candace Rondeaux				
<b>Reviewed By:</b> (Name, title and date)				
Krisanne Campos				
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• NSC and the War Czar</li><li>• Interagency Coordination and Transition</li><li>• Resource Reviews</li><li>• Ongoing debate about the creation of a National Security Budget</li><li>• NSC Staff on AIOG</li><li>• NSC/AIOG/IPC process</li><li>• Transition from Bush to Obama</li><li>• Strategic Objectives</li><li>• Personnel Readiness</li><li>• CERP</li><li>• S/CRS</li></ul>				



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### NSC and the War Czar

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) when Afghanistan was overshadowed by Iraq. At that time there were two people handling Afghanistan: there was a senior director and a part time director. Then Gen. Lute was appointed as the war czar. It was anything and everything at that time, (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C). It took a long time to set up a team. Pretty much everyone was focused on Iraq but all the major lift was on Afghanistan.

The benefit of attention being focused on Iraq was that it allowed us the space we needed to do what we needed and to respond to what was happening instead of being caught up in endless meetings. For the folks who were working on Iraq it was just a constant churn and there was very little space. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) there was a lot to deal with. There were new drug control policies. We were planning for a state visit from Karzai. There was the Korean hostage crisis.

### Interagency Coordination and Transition

The interagency at that time was well-honed, well-organized. There were routines and there were working groups. We worked the issues. What you have now is something altogether different.

*(Mentions that David Rothkopf's portrayal of the situation in his latest book National Insecurity resonates with interviewee's perception of the shifts on NSC between Bush Obama administrations)*  
There are transitions that happen and go well and there are ones that don't. What I saw was that things feel apart between administrations. WE were lucky to have a very organized, networked staff at the outset. Issues were deliberated on and worked and they were pushed up to the deputies as options.

### Resource Reviews

NSC did them both for Iraq and Afghanistan. These were conducted at General Lute's initiation. That was just his character; he was always looking to connect ways, ends and means. With resource reviews we were less consumed with meetings and we didn't have the same kind of pressures as those who were working on Iraq. But with Afghanistan by 2007 the money was flowing fast and furious. We were in crisis management mode and we were dumping more money into the country than it could possibly absorb.

### Ongoing debate about the creation of a National Security Budget

There was a lot of talk about the creation of a [unified] national security budget but we had to work with the system as it was set up. We inherited a program and a strategy that was already underway and in those situations you never have the luxury of going back and starting from scratch.

*(Interviewee mentions annual OMB prep)*



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We had opportunities. Things had opened up. If we had things to do we could get them done. With Iraq we did not have that space because so much of the focus was on Iraq.

### NSC staff on AIOG

We were all self-selecting in. When we came to the table there was a common outlook. We said what can we do about this how can we organize this better, what needs to get done. With Gen. Lute there was a constant need to integrate. He looked at it from a military perspective, that we needed to tie up ends, ways and means.

With the resource review we tried to be as unthreatening as possible and positioned ourselves as monitoring the process and pushing up decisions at the deputy level. To get results we were looking for issues that would bubble up with OMB. We were asking are we getting what we expected out of the spending. Are the streams working together? If INL had money for policing and USAID for training the police on rule of law related issues were we simply assuming that in aggregate that strategic outcomes were being met?

### NSC/AIOG/IPC process

We were working the issues at the lower level and pushing them up to the IPC level to the assistant secretaries and DASD's. There were serious working groups and debates around the table. It was all about relationships. We were driving policy through a device that pushed up options to the deputies. ....OMB participated at every level. It wasn't led by OMB; it was led by NSC but OMB was at the table shaping and participating.

### Transition from Bush to Obama

In 2009 as I was leaving there was a whole new strategy and a whole new group with a different philosophy. We had Bruce Reidel leading the new review. It was like we're all sort of suspect. None of us political appointees. We were all veteran career civil servants but we were regarded as leftovers from the other administration.

*(Interviewee mentions that they wrote the executive order that supported the Obama administration's ability to carry out the surge). Most of the team stayed on [through the transition from Bush to Obama] but the new administration pushed to do it a different way at first. In the end they ended up in pretty much the same place as where we had started.)*

Under this administration the organization is more or less the same as prior but they haven't run it in the same way. So many came from the Hill where the view is that the Executive Branch is your natural adversary.

When Jones came in one of the first things he said is we're going to need some new people here, people we can trust.



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The NSC has gotten so huge. It's almost tried to replace the interagency. Under this arrangement you have deputies micromanaging decisions. When I was there our job was to facilitate decisions to bring people in, bring people together and make them articulate their equities and sort out their differences.

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

But you had to be pretty much ready for anything at any given time.

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

AIOG was equivalent to an IPC there were also working group meetings on a range of subjects. Except for the CT which we left to the military side of the house we had decided to divide working group issues by thematic area (handled PRT's and coordinating with donors for more effective aid distribution).

With donors we understood we didn't control all the space. It's not just a question of how well did we do it was a question of how well did we do with the other donors and then how well did the other donors do. It was a constant negotiation. It was messy. With the resource review we had a better sense of what we had and where are the gaps.

You can talk in straight dollars and results but then when you get on the ground and deal with the ministries you realize you don't own all the space. You don't own clear lines from dollars to results.

(Interviewee mentions that they were on the country mission staff for USAID in Afg from 2003 to 2004; interviewee worked with OTI on a number of projects including a radio station kit distribution program before PRT's were fully operational.)

When Eikenberry was still on the ground OMC-A was predominant, but gradually more donors were trying to put in place a few fixes. We were working on currency stabilization. Closer to 2004 when we were starting to get a handle on things there was a recognition that we needed more coordination. We realized we could plan all we want but if the Afghans weren't able to plan it wouldn't mean anything.

ARTF was a means to reduce duplication and friction between donors and reduce the burden on the small number of Afghan staff. Getting IMF involved meant that the government would have to be more responsive. The kind of capacity building that it takes to stand up and run a government at a level that we'll feel comfortable with takes years and years to build. A lot of what we were doing was retrofitting the results.



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### Strategic objectives

The biggest gap we had was that I don't think we had an end state in mind. We kept planning; conditions kept changing. We were solving problems but there was no end state vision that you could point to. If you had to say by 2015 what do you want it to look like, you couldn't really do it.

On the army, the ANA we talked about levels. WE talked about capabilities that we could put on Power Points but we couldn't get beyond that.

The closest we came to getting what we needed was HTT's but they were seven years too late. We serviced based on the social networks of the people we were comfortable with, with the people who spoke English.

### Personnel readiness

(Development implementers weren't trained for the environment and military weren't trained for the development task.) As far as counterinsurgency, we weren't trained for it. We weren't geared for it and we didn't do it well as a result. We'd spend all this time preparing power points but after the first four slides on COIN the rest of the 15 were business as usual because it wasn't in our culture. It wasn't in our training. To be effective we have to be able to engage people but that's not the business model.

You had one person in charge of \$30 to \$50 million a year and they were obligated to spend it down. When it's like that you're not managing change, you're just writing checks.

### CERP

They were collapsing our radio stations as fast as we built them. We'd come in give them a radio station kit and then a little while later some staff sergeant would come in and say here's \$10,000 go build yourself a radio station and then before you know it the community would get into a war over resources.

You would talk to Afghans and realize you weren't getting them the things they need. They didn't actually need beautiful new schools. They need books. They need teachers to show up at the schools. They need salaries for the teachers.

There was too much money for the absorption capacity there.

### S/CRS

A lot of people looked at S/CRS like it was alien, like 'what are they trying to do?' Then it got going there was actually more coordination. (Interviewee mentions that they went from USAID OTI to S/CRS to NSC) NSPD 44 formalized the coordination process



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(Interviewee explains that AIOG under Lute prepared Monthly Resource Review slides; believes most slides were unclassified. Details budget line item requests, resource allocation etc.)